DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment for Grazing Authorization, #NM-066-98-080

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing lease to Emilio Burguete for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #62051. The lease will authorize 136 cows yearlong at 100% Federal Range from March 1 to the end of February, for 1,632 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed action were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470).

The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R Kreager — 8/13/99
Assistant Field Manager — Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 62051

EA # NM-066-98-080

AUGUST, 1998

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ROSWELL FIELD OFFICE
ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

Environmental Assessment for Grazing Allotment 62051

I.Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations 43 CFR allow for a ten-year lease to be issued for grazing outside the grazing district boundary. A site specific analysis of the impacts of renewing a grazing lease to the applicant, Emilio Burguete Inc., is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the renewal of the lease on allotment 62051. This allotment is within the *Pinion/Juniper* vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement(RMP/EIS) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA)(33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.).

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize the grazing lease on allotment 62051 for 136 animal units (AUs) year long for 1632 animal unit months (AUMs). The lease would be offered to Emilio Burguete Inc.

B. No authorization alternative

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a new grazing lease for allotment 62051. No grazing would be authorized on federal land in allotment 62051 under this alternative.

III. Affected Environment

General Setting

Allotment 62051 is located in Guadalupe and Lincoln County, about 17 miles southeast of Vaughn, New Mexico. The allotment is made up of eight pastures and three traps. These pastures are fenced with net wire fencing. The allotment is watered by pipeline systems supplied by wells and by water in natural depressions. This allotment consists of 5,914 acres of Federal land, 5,642 acres of State Land, and 15,127 acres of private land (See attached map).

The area of allotment 62051 consists of rolling grass covered hills. Grass species comprise 90+ percent of the existing plant community. The average recorded precipitation for the area is 15.87 inches. Elevations range from 5560 to 5900 feet above sea level.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Floodplains, Riparian/Wetlands, and Minority/Low Income Populations.

Cave, karst, and recreation resources have been reviewed. Dispersed recreation occurs in the area. These activities may include hunting, caving, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, horseback riding and hiking.

Legal and physical Access to public lands located in this allotment are through state lands and county maintained roads. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails. The majority of public lands in this allotment can only be accessed by foot (hiking, or walking).

Due to the fact that pubic land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences, the general public is reluctant to use these public lands.

The public lands within this allotment have been designated, “High cave and Karst potential. At the present time, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. There are known caves just east and south of this allotment.

Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within

this allotment, since the recreational use of these public lands are relatively low. Caves and karst are not known to exist, therefore no affect is known.

A. Affected Resources

1. Soils

The soils present on allotment 62051 are primarily the Pastura loams and the Pastura-Harvey association. The Pastura loam soil is gently sloping, very shallow and shallow, well drained, and occurs mainly on the uplands. It formed in alluvium derived dominantly from limestone. Typically, the upper 2 inches of the surface layer is brown loam and the lower 5 inches is brown clay loam. The substratum is brown gravelly clay loam about 6 inches thick over indurated caliche. Permeability of the Pastura soil is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 5 to 20 inches. Available water capacity is very low. Runoff is rapid, and hazard of water erosion is high. The hazard for soil blowing is high. The Pastura-Harvey association is moderately sloping, occurring on the valley sides and uplands. The Harvey soil is very deep and well drained. Typically, the surface layer is brown sandy loam about 4 inches thick. The subsoil is light brown sandy loam about 11 inches thick. Permeability of the Harvey soil is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate. The hazard of soil blowing is high. More information on the soils can be found in the "Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area New Mexico". There is no soil survey available for the Guadalupe County portion of the allotment so the adjacent Lincoln County data was used.

2. Vegetation

One ecological (range) site covers all of the federal land in allotment 62051. The site is Hills CP-3. Blue grama is the dominate grass species present with New Mexico feathergrass, black grama, three-awn, sideoats grama, wolftail, and hairy grama being present in various percentages. Shrub and half-shrubs include Yucca, cholla cactus, wolfberry, catclaw, and snakeweed. Forbs of various species occurs when moisture conditions are favorable.

There are two vegetative studies on this allotment which was established and monitored in 1991. The three west pastures have had range monitoring studies completed periodically since 1982. Analysis of the monitoring data from these studies indicates that there is sufficient forage produced on the federal land for 136 AUs on a yearlong basis and any wildlife that use the area. The data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in fair to good condition. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife

The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and small populations of mule deer. The area is lacking in brush or tree species that would provide good cover

for deer. The area is occurs in the northern end of the Macho Wildlife Habitat Area.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

The only known threatened or endangered species of plants or animals on allotment 62051 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon, may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management

The allotment is grazed by cattle and sheep. The latest grazing permit for the federal land was for 68 cows and 340 sheep. The livestock are managed according to a Plan of Operations established by the livestock operator and the Soil Conservation Service. This plan was concurred to by the Bureau of Land Management for the allotment. A Holistic Resource Management Plan (HRM) is used for the management decisions. The HRM plan addresses the overall improvement of the resources present. The HRM plan is available for review at the Roswell Field Office.

6. Visual Resources

Allotment 62051 is located within both Class III and Class IV Visual Resource Management areas. U. S. Highway 285 crosses two parcels of the federal land. Other scattered parcels of federal land are crossed by or are visible from county roads.

7. Water Quality

No permanent live water exists in the area, but several natural depressions catch and hold water during precipitation events. The amount of water and the period of retention are dependent on the weather conditions.

8. Air Quality

Air quality is generally good. The area is in a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils

The soils will be directly influenced by livestock grazing. Under an HRM plan the chipping of the soil surface caused by hoof action helps to recycle nutrients. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface which breaks up and capping of the surface. Under an HRM system, the livestock are managed so that soil compaction is kept to a minimum in bedding areas, around waters, and by trailing. Livestock remove standing vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain, and surface runoff. Managed utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns under the HRM operation retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action for federal land, would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and development of the soils. The percent vegetative composition, bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation grazed by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. Ecological condition as shown by the monitoring studies indicates that the vegetation is sustainable at the past and proposed amount of grazing by livestock.

3. Wildlife

Wildlife will continue to compete with domestic livestock for forage and browse. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. The lack of adequate cover for wildlife species will continue to be a limiting factor in this area. Maintenance and operation of existing watering will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

Livestock grazing, as a result of renewal of the grazing lease, may affect, but not likely adversely affect the bald eagle. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. There would be no effect to the peregrine falcon as important riparian habitat or potential nest sites are not found on the allotment. No occupied or historic nesting habitat occurs within the allotment or within 3400 meters (2.1 mi.) of the exterior allotment boundary.

5. Livestock Management

The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management under the HRM plan to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water is available for wildlife. It has been shown that livestock grazed using an HRM plan will increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind

and water erosion.

6. Visual Resources

The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Water Quality

Livestock grazing will not have a significant influence on water quality. Ground water is pumped from a wells. The amount of sediments into natural depressions is directly related to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

8. Air Quality

The proposed action will not have measurable effect on the air quality.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils

The soil will not be subjected to chipping of the soil surface and standing vegetation reduction that are associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be slower than with grazing using the HRM plan. Soil infiltration would be reduced on the allotment if the soil remained capped.

2. Vegetation

There would be a small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent, which would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.

3. Wildlife

There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage and cover on the federal lands.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be very little, if any, change to the bald eagle or the peregrine falcon habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock Management

Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing authorized on the federal land in the area of allotment 62051. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

6. Visual Resources

No change in the visual resources; scale, land-form, and color; would occur with the no grazing alternative.

7. Water Quality

Water quality, either surface or ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

8. Air Quality

There would be no change to the in air quality with the no grazing alternative.

V. Cumulative Impacts

No cumulative impacts to the environment are anticipated by the authorization of grazing on allotment 62051 as listed in the proposed action or from the no action alternative.

VI. Residual Impacts

There are no residual impacts anticipated for the proposed action or the alternative(s).

VII. Mitigating Measure

If new information surfaces that indicate that livestock grazing is negatively affecting any other resources, action will be taken to mitigate those impacts.